



State of South Carolina
Office of The Lieutenant Governor

André Bauer
Lieutenant Governor

Office on Aging
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Director

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**More than Third of SC's 600,000 Medicare
Beneficiaries Missing in Action on Part D**

(Columbia, S.C. -) Lt. Governor André Bauer said today that 62% of South Carolina's 600,000 Medicare beneficiaries now have drug coverage through the new Medicare Part D prescription drug program or equivalent coverage under their retirement health plan. But the numbers just released by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) leave more than 227,000 seniors and people with disabilities in the state unaccounted for in terms of enrolling in Part D.

"I am very concerned. Almost 196,000 people are enrolled in the new drug plan, and an additional 177,000 will be able to maintain their existing coverage through their retirement plans that are now subsidized by Medicare. But the largest category – 227,000 – is people we have not heard from," said Bauer. "They may be on the fence because their prescription needs are so limited that they feel it is cheaper to pay as they go rather than paying an insurance premium, deductibles and co-pays. Or, they could be among the thousands who are calling for help because they are confused by the dozens of plans competing for their enrollment."

Bauer said current Medicare Part D enrollment in South Carolina is 195,878, which breaks down as follows:

- 64,759 have opted for one of the 45 stand-alone prescription drug plans available in South Carolina;
- 18,074 are enrolled in one of the state's 11 Medicare Advantage plans that offer prescription drugs in combination with such other health services as doctor and hospital care; and

- more -

- 113,045 were auto-enrolled by Medicaid into a Part D plan.

CMS, which administers the Part D program, reports that 177,042 persons are maintaining their existing coverage from retirement plans that are "creditable," which means their coverage is as good as or better than Medicare's Part D package. This includes:

- 106,393 covered by retirement plans receiving a 28% subsidy from Medicare to continue drug coverage, and
- 70,649 federal retirees covered by such programs as Tricare and the Federal Employees Health Benefit program.

The Lt. Governor's Office on Aging continues to counsel and enroll seniors calling its toll-free number of 1-800-868-9095. Meanwhile, the directors of the state's 10 Area Agencies on Aging report that their regional information, referral and assistance staff is equally challenged by the volume of calls pouring in from seniors seeking assistance. Bauer said agencies working with seniors all across the country are reporting similar situations.

"An hour or more may be required to resolve each call because staff enters the senior's exact prescription needs – drug name, dosage, units – into the on-line application at www.Medicare.gov in order to find the Part D prescription program that is the best fit for that individual," said Bauer. "We are clearing our voice mail boxes three times an hour, and those calls will be worked one senior at a time until we are satisfied that 600,000 South Carolina Medicare beneficiaries are aware of their options and are comfortable with their decisions about joining the voluntary Part D program."

Families may also contact Medicare directly at 1-800-MEDICARE.

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